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Yemen : Government fails to live up to its commitments to protect human rights

Torture, hundreds of “disappearances”, violations of women’s rights and arbitrary detention -- particularly journalists and opposition politicians -- continues in Yemen with alarming frequency, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

“Despite government commitments to protect human rights and to investigate ‘disappearances’, the pattern of human rights violations identified by the organization in the near past continues to the present day,” Amnesty International said.

Legal safeguards concerning arrest, detention and fair trial continue to be routinely violated, in the absence of effective and independent judicial supervision of arrests and detention.

For example, Muhsin Ahmad al-‘Amudi, a prominent member of the political opposition party *Rabitat Abnaa al- Yaman* (the League of the Sons of Yemen) was arrested at the end of July 1997 at 3am by a group of armed men. He was held in incommunicado detention for 20 days, denied access to a lawyer or to a doctor, and his family was refused to permission to visit him. After his release in early September 1997 without charge, he was rearrested two months later and detained for 38 days before being released, again without charge.

Torture continues to be used in detention centres, police stations and prisons throughout the country, although torture is a criminal offence in Yemen, under provisions of both the constitution and the Penal Code, and despite the fact that Yemen has an obligation, as a state party to the UN Convention against Torture, to end torture.

“At first I was suspended from my feet, which they beat violently with various types of sticks and hoses.. My legs were so swollen, I couldn’t recognize them”. These are the words used by Ahmed Sa’d Bazara’a, a communications engineer arrested in September 1997 in connection with bomb explosions, to describe his ordeal to the Sira Court of First Instance in ‘Aden.

“The most striking example of the Government’s failure to live up to its commitment to investigate allegations of torture is the case of Wadi’ Hilal al-Sheibani, who died in Solaban military prison in ‘Aden in late 1997,” Amnesty international said.

Wadi’Hilal al-Sheibani was arrested near the Saudi border in August 1997 by members of the Political Security reportedly in connection with a bomb explosion in ‘Aden. He was held incommunicado until his death in custody at the end of September 1997.

No thorough and independent investigation into the allegations of torture and subsequent death is known to have taken place.

Another empty promise of the government was to investigate hundreds of “disappearances”; most recently the large scale “disappearances” during the civil war which broke out in May 1994.

Amnesty International said hundreds of victims have “disappeared “ since the late 1960s in the former Yemen Arab Republic, the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen and the current Republic of Yemen.

Although all citizens of Yemen are guaranteed equality by the Constitution, human rights violations are perpetrated against women as a result of their gender. “The practice of indefinite detention of women prisoners until a male guardian will collect them is a particular example of a human rights violation based on gender,”Amnesty International said.

Executions and the use of death penalty after unfair trials is another source of concern which is heightened by examples of speedy and summary executions. For instance, Faisal Saleh bin Zuba’a who was accused of murder of a popular doctor on 12 October 1998 of a murder of a doctor, was executed on 14 October 1998 after a trial which lasted only two days.

Amnesty International is urging once again the Government of Yemen to finally act on its previous commitments to the organization’s delegates over the years, and to close the gap between its obligations under international human rights treaties and their actual implementation.

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